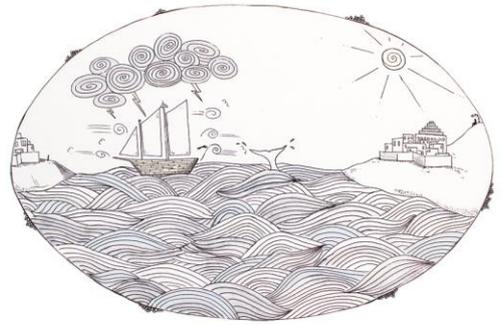


# JONAH

When God loves people more than you do.



## Week Three: Swallowed By Grace

Text: Jonah 1:17-2:10

The trials that Jonah faces at the hand of God are evidences of God's grace. God deals with Jonah's rebellion in a way that draws Jonah into a place of dependence on God once again. Had God not continued to pursue and press Jonah hard, so that he did turn from his rebellion, it would have been an act of judgment on God's behalf (Romans 1:24). When God leaves us to our sin and stops intervening, we have a far graver issue on our hands than the trials he brings to pursue us. So, let's really pay attention to what God's grace looks like through Jonah's near death and rescue, in the belly of a fish.

### 1 Grace Pursues

- Read Jonah 1:17, Romans 5:6-8 & Hebrews 3:12-15

Although Jonah knew he had done wrong, he did not call out to God in repentance. He just assumed that he would die in the waves, due to his own sin. But God intervened, even though Jonah had no faith in God's grace, by appointing the great fish to swallow him, so that he would not drown in the turbulent sea. God did not calm the storm and send Jonah to shore immediately, so that he could skip off in rebellion again, but instead used an extremely uncomfortable situation, over the course of three days, to work on Jonah's heart. It is critical to understand, from this passage, that the trials that we are, at times, forced into, are very often an act of grace and mercy from God himself. It may not feel like it at the time, but God is working for our good in and through them.

- ❖ Q: Why was it a sign of grace, and not of judgment, that the Lord appointed the fish to swallow Jonah?
- ❖ Q: Why would it have been far worse (and unloving) for Jonah, had God just left him on the boat and not done anything to turn Jonah back towards him?
- ❖ Q: How does this change the way we see the trials we are going through, or those of loved ones?

### 2. Grace Presses Hard

God had to be hard with Jonah in order to work on his heart. In his time of deepest distress, Jonah called out to the Lord, and God heard his cry. But he still intentionally left Jonah in that situation for three days.

- ❖ Q: Why is it so hard for us to wrap our heads around the fact that God left Jonah in his trial once he had come around to praying?
- ❖ Q: What do you think that time of desperation did to Jonah's faith?
- ❖ Q: Have you ever been in a situation so long that you felt God had abandoned you, even though you had turned to the Lord? What do you make of this in hindsight?

### 3. Grace Keeps Present

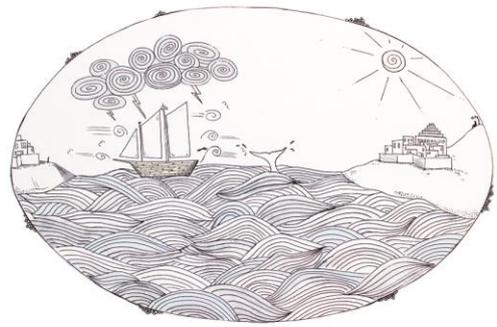
- Read Jonah 1:7

When Jonah cried out to God, his prayers reached God because he was present in Jonah's suffering. He was not distant and he had not abandoned Jonah. He knew what was happening, and how long it would take, and was in control the whole time.

- ❖ Q: Why is it so important for us to believe that God is present, even in the times of trial that are serving to discipline us?

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## 4. Grace Progresses

The goal of the trial was to keep moving Jonah's heart along. The end goal was to rescue Jonah, and bring him to land so that he could and would continue with God's mission. It may have been a rotten situation for Jonah to be in, but it accomplished God's purposes. The trials we face are equally purposeful. It is often only with hindsight that we are able to see the great work that God did in us throughout the most difficult seasons of life, and how he moved us closer towards his goal for our lives.

- ❖ Q: Why do you think it's important to see that grace not only just covers sin, but also moves our hearts and lives away from sin and into obedience to Christ?
- ❖ Q: In what way have we misunderstood God's grace when we (at times) have believed that God has kindly left people to remain in habitual sin? (For example, when Christians in our community have chosen to ignore God's instructions for marriage and purity, and moved in together without being married – and we have mistakenly thought that God has just let that one slide because he is gracious).
- ❖ Q: Why does grace progress?

## 5. Grace Persists

- Read Jonah 1:8-9

In reading the rest of this passage, we can be mistaken into thinking that Jonah was a changed man. But this was not entirely the case. In response to his rescue, he was grateful and wanted to worship God. But he also revealed his lack of understanding of God's grace. Having been a rebel himself, and having just been rescued despite himself, he still called the sailors "idol-worshippers", as though their sin were more profound than his. Jonah did not really understand the true nature of his salvation and yet, despite this, God saved him. This is great news for us. Some of us are like Jonah, or the Pharisees in Jesus' day, who think we are better than we are, and do not see our sin for what it really is, but there are others of us who know we are rebels to the core. Yet Jesus came to save both parties - and all of those in between who place their faith and trust in him to save them. Christ saves people *despite themselves*. Salvation belongs to God alone, and not to us, which is the biggest relief!

This passage calls us to respond in the following ways:

- i. Call on the Lord
  - ii. Confess your need – acknowledge your inability to rescue yourself from your own pride or rebellion, knowing fully that salvation belongs to God.
  - iii. Commit to his service – as a response to all that he has saved you from. Service is an act of worship, not an act of penance.
- ❖ Q: Do you identify more with Jonah (who, like most religious people, think they are more righteous than they are and criticize everyone else around them), or do you identify more with those who really realize their desperation for God's grace and mercy?
  - ❖ Q: Why is it so scandalous that God persists with Jonah, even though he clearly does not fully understand God's grace or the profundity of his own salvation?

### Personal Reflection Q:

- ❖ Q: What is the one big take-away that God has prompted you to take on board this week through this message?